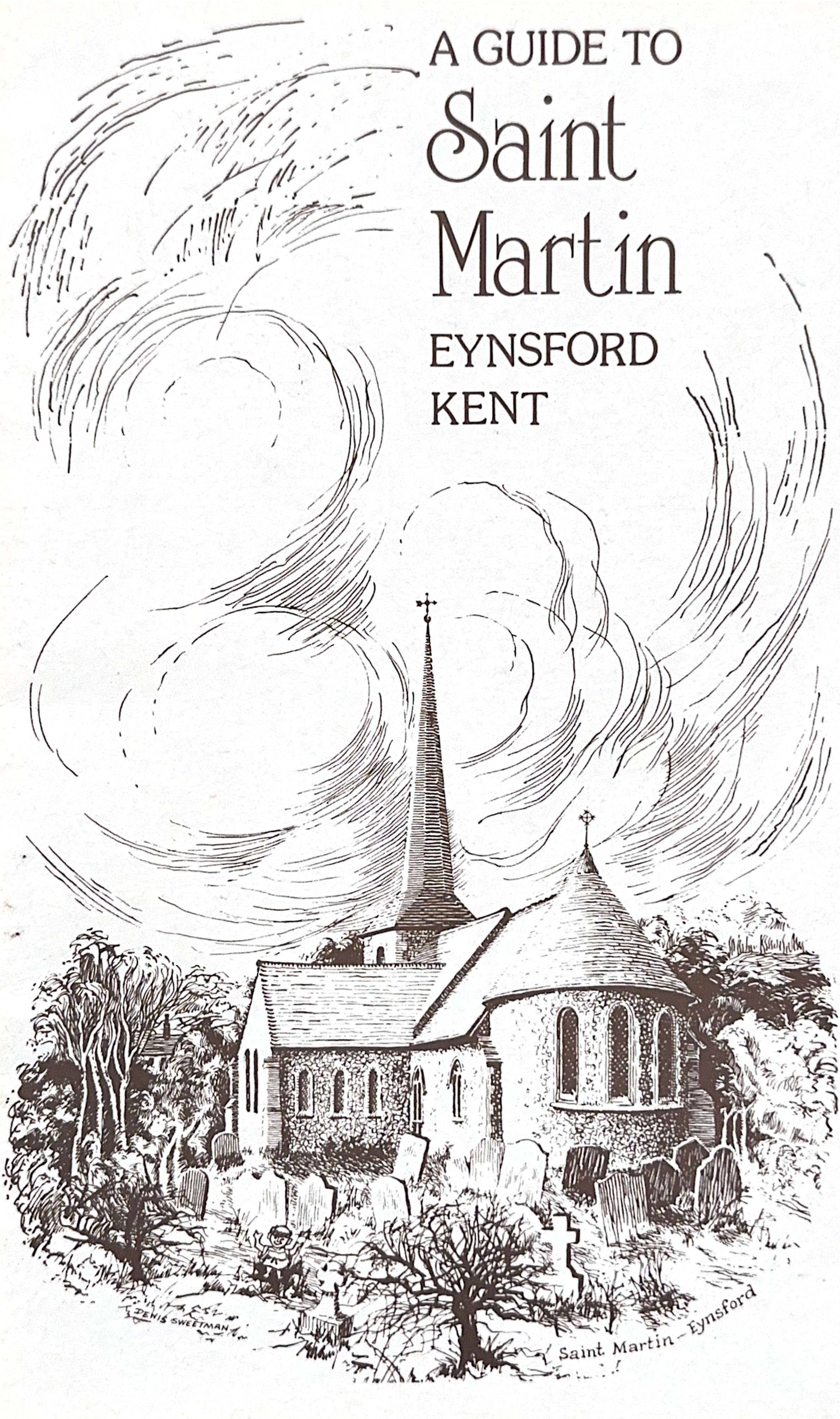
A GUIDE TO Saint Martin

EYNSFORD
KENT



The Church of SAINT MARTIN of Tours

To the Visitor

I thoroughly recommend this pamphlet on the Parish Church of Eynsford. Its author, Mr C. Harvey, has undertaken a great deal of research and gone to much trouble in order to write it at my request and I am most grateful to him for a splendid piece of work.

St. Martin's is a particularly interesting Church for it has retained its Norman ground plan and is noteworthy for still having an apsidal chancel common to many Norman parish churches when first built, but often squared in later centuries (*see* the reproduction overleaf of the ground plan of a common Norman parish church and compare the nave and chancel of St. Martin's).

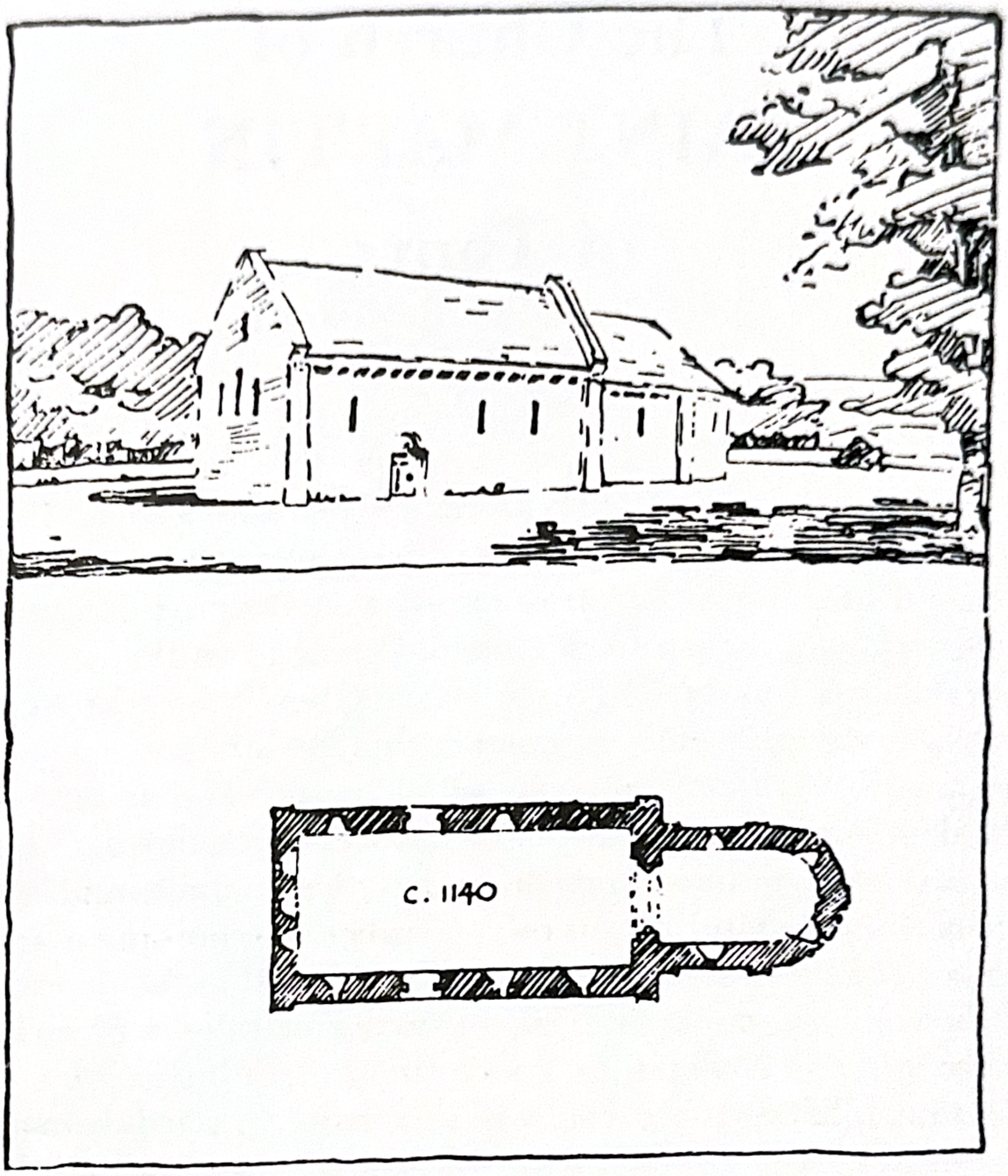
Another point of unusual interest will be found in the diversity of the windows which in one church give useful illustrations of architectural development from Norman to Tudor times.

These and other features will be more readily detected through the use of this Guide and I hope you will enjoy investigating them, not forgetting to say a prayer to the One for whose glory this church was erected so many years ago.

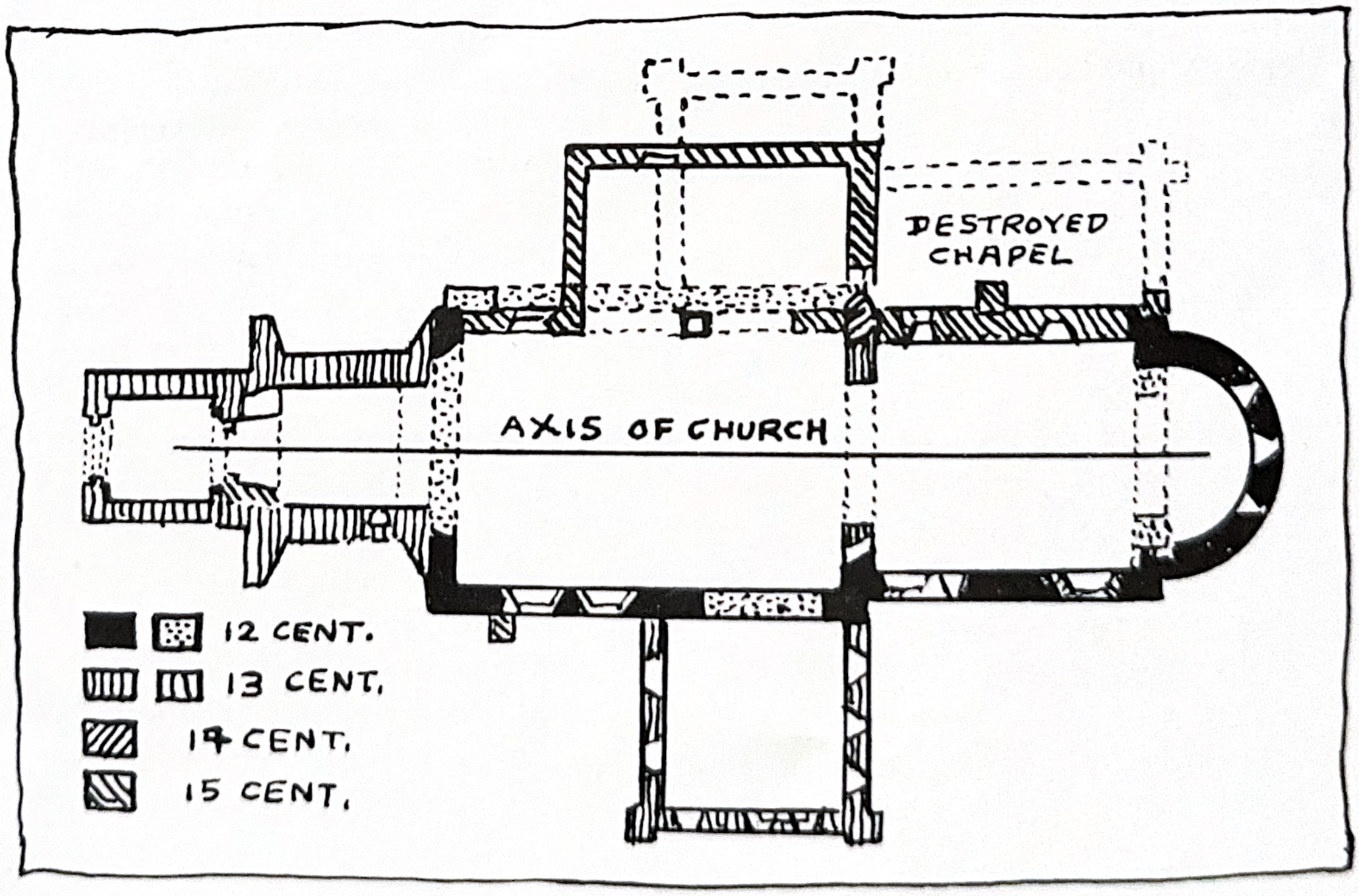
A. A. TUFFIN, Vicar 1964

This Guide book was reprinted, with additional items, in 1973.

D. H. SWEETMAN, Rector.



Sketch of a typical Norman parish church about 1140; note the similarity to the present-day plan, below.



A General Historical Outline

To appreciate the origins of Eynsford Church, it is necessary to go back to the early years of the tenth century when Alphege, a Saxon thane, made valuable gifts of land to the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury. At his death, however, Leofsune, a distant relative, laid claim to these lands. The resulting litigation came to a hearing at Crayford before Wulsi (Uulsi), the county judge, in effect, and he found in favour of the monks who were represented at the hearing by Archbishop St. Dunstan (died 988) and the Bishops of London and Rochester.

Although there was a Saxon church here when Domesday Book was compiled in 1086, and when Ralph, son of Unspac (of Scandinavian origin) was holding these lands of the Archbishop (who had taken them over from Christ Church to his own jurisdiction), nothing is known of it and most likely it was of timber construction.

It was probably in the first decade or two of the twelfth century that the Norman stone Church was built. About that time Ralph's successor, William Fitz-Ralph, 'lord of the soil of Ainsford', was holding Eynsford under the Archbishop, and we find that he restored the Church of St. Martin of Eynsford, with all its appurtenances to the monastery of Christ Church and himself subsequently took the Monastic habit about 1135. It is to be noted that William Fitz-Ralph or William de Eynsford I, was first of a line of six Williams de Eynsford, the best known of whom is Sir William de Eynsford III.

The Norman Church seems to have been a three-cell structure consisting of nave, chancel and apsidal sanctuary. The fact that walls of this building still exist, testifies to the soundness of the masons' work.

When William Fitz-Ralph's grandson, Sir William de Eynsford III (he so describes himself in a charter . . . 'tertius qui nunc est' . . .) was Lord of the Manor *c.*1163, we find Eynsford Church figuring in a quarrel between Henry II and Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. This arose when Becket, considering himself entitled to the patronage of all churches situated on estates under his see, presented a clerk named Laurence to Eynsford. Sir William, however, objecting to the right of nomination and urging that when his grandfather had made his bequest it was on condition that should the living fall vacant, the patronage should revert to his heirs, turned the new beneficiary out of his church. The Archbishop thereupon excommunicated Sir William de Eynsford III but the latter, as *persona grata* at the court of Henry II, was not prepared to accept the excommunication without question. He

appealed to the King, who complained to the Archbishop that without informing him, he had excommunicated one of his 'Tenants-in-chief', a man eligible to be called to his council and court and that the Archbishop had exposed his royal person to the risk of consorting with an excommunicated person. 'Since I have not been warned' said Henry, 'and since my dignity has been injured in this essential point, the excommunication of my vassal is void.' The King availed himself of customs of the Kingdom, established by William the Conqueror, which forbade such sentence on the King's barons without the royal consent, and Becket was obliged to withdraw his excommunication. The concession was made so tardily and so ungraciously, however, that Henry exclaimed 'Now I owe him no thanks for it'.

No doubt this quarrel served still further to widen the breach between Henry II and his former Chancellor and friend, Thomas Becket (whom Henry himself had presented to Canterbury), which culminated in the murder of the Archbishop in his Cathedral in 1170. Sir William de Eynsford III was closely associated also with the Becket controversy, exactly eight centuries ago, when in 1164, the Archbishop retracted the assent he had given to the Constitutions of Clarendon. Sir William de Eynsford III subsequently restored Eynsford Church to the monks of Christ Church, and a representation of his seal on the confirming charter may be seen on the cover of the Official Guide Book to Eynsford Castle by Mr. S. E. Rigold.

Early in the reign of Henry III, Henry de Cundicot, Rector of Eynsford, claimed to treat the Chapel of Freningham (Farningham) as a chapel-of-ease to Eynsford. The then Archbishop, Stephen Langton, gave a ruling, however, forbidding any further interference by Eynsford in the affairs of Farningham.

Following disciplinary action by Archbishop Pecham (Peckham) in his reform of abuses, particularly the absence of clerics, including that of Eynsford, from their benefices, we find the appointment of Robert de Farenbergh *c.*1283, as the first *vicar* recorded by name.

There were considerable alterations to the Church in the thirteenth century. First the building was made cruciform by the addition of transepts, only the southern of which still remains, and soon afterwards a chapel was built to the north of the chancel and the apsidal Norman sanctuary was largely reconstructed. Later in the century the chancel arch was rebuilt in its present form and the west tower was added. This was shortly followed by a further extension westwards when the porch was built.

In the Tudor period, the northern transept and chapel were demolished and the nave was enlarged by the addition of the short north aisle. Thus the fabric assumed its present ground plan.

The Eynsford Parish Register commences with the year 1538 and bears the title:

The booke of register for
Eynsford
of all Marriages, Christenings and Burialls sence
Ano 1538

It is in parchment and is one of the 812 registers commencing with the year 1538 known to exist in this country at the beginning of the present century. Towards the end of the sixteenth century it became compulsory for the registers to be kept in parchment books into which the earlier records from 1538 had to be transcribed and it appears that this work was done by Mark Burre, vicar from 1579-1630. He maintained the register in good order and from the large number of recorded interments in 1593 and 1595, often of many members of the same family within a few days of each other it may well be that an epidemic was sweeping the village in those years.

Some noted incumbents of Eynsford were:

JOHN BOWLES, D.D. (1614)
became Bishop of Rochester in 1629.

JOHN GIFFORD, D.D. (1629)
Chaplain to King Charles I, he died within a year of the King's execution in 1649.

JOHN LYNCH, D.D. (1731)
became Dean of Canterbury, and

GEORGE SECKER, D.D. (1760)
became both Dean of Canterbury and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral.

It was the above Doctor John Gifford who granted *'to the said Sir Percyvale Hart of Lullington* (sic) *and his Lady . . . free leave and liberty to inlarge their saide seate or pewe uppe into the chancell from the wall of partition between the church and chancell . . .'*

It is probable that when this concession was made, the Church at Lullington was not in use, possibly owing to work being carried out on the fabric.

Tour of the Church: Interior

The Church is entered through the spacious late thirteenth century west porch, in which you will see two medieval stone coffins removed in 1840 from the churchyard on the north side of the chancel where a chapel formerly stood. From the porch a tall doorway of twelfth century origin gives access to the tower. This doorway has characteristic Norman ornamented nook-shafts and scalloped capitols supporting a semi-circular arch, which is enriched with two orders of chevron mouldings and encloses a tympanum decorated with shallow diapering. The wooden lintel and inner pointed arch are fourteenth or fifteenth century insertions. The doorway is not in its original position and was probably moved here when the tower was built in the thirteenth century; the work was clumsily performed, with the result that the voussoirs do not fit the arch, two extra stones having been introduced to make up the deficiency. But despite its imperfections, this remains the most notable Norman doorway in the district.

Just beyond this doorway a flattened Tudor arch opens into the tower. Overhead is a peal of eight bells. An entry in an inventory of the Church made in 1552 reads, 'First iij bells suted of bras in the steple', but none of these still exists.

During the 300 years since the casting of the two original bells inscribed: 'Michael Darbie made me 1651', six more were added, at various dates, to produce a fine, though light, ring of eight. Two bells were cast during the reign of Charles II and bore the inscription: 'John Hodson made me 1674'. An older bell, made by Giles Reeves, bell founder 1591, was re-cast and inscribed: 'Thomas Lester of London made me 1746'. This was followed two years later by another bell inscribed: 'The Gt. of Lady Dyke, fecit 1748'. Two more were cast, by Mears and Stainbank, and dedicated in 1903. In 1973, due to infestation by death watch beetle, it became necessary to replace the timbered beams which support the bell chamber with a steel framework. At the same time a new ringing floor was added.

The small doorway near the south-east corner originally gave access to a medieval stairway up to the first stage of the tower (doubtless also used in more recent times for reaching the former gallery at the west end of the nave) but the stair turret has been demolished.

The nave is entered through the tower arch, which is thirteenth century work but was altered in the Tudor period. On passing through this arch note the barrel ceiling. Unfortunately owing to the ravages of time and to infestation by death-watch beetle it became necessary in

1960 completely to renew the former timbered nave roof. The difficult problem of safely transmitting the thrust of a new roof to the age-old walls was ingeniously solved by casting reinforced concrete lintels on top of the north and south nave walls, bonding these lintels with a similar reinforced concrete lintel above the chancel arch and coupling the wall-lintels, near the west-end of the nave, by a transverse steel tie-rod.

A gallery at one time occupied the west end of the nave. You may still see, although not in the original position, the finely carved, gilded arms of George III (1760-1820) which adorned it. Beneath the escutcheon there was formerly an inscription which stated that the Church was repaired and beautified in 177—. The gallery was removed in the nineteenth century.

Passing along the nave you will be conscious of the rising floor-level which is due to the sloping site on which the Church stands. The floor was lowered by about one foot in the nineteenth century restoration when the present pews were installed.

The early fifteenth century octagonal font is of Kentish ragstone. On its west face are a cross and crown of thorns, symbols of the Passion: on the south a tau-cross believed to represent the signing with the cross in baptism; on the east the pall from the arms of the archbishops of Canterbury in whose diocese Eynsford came until the beginning of the present century; the other faces, except for one which has a plain shield, are carved with single roses. On the rim are traces of the staples to which in pre-Reformation times a font cover was locked to prevent theft of the hallowed water for superstitious purposes.

Turning right, in front of the organ console and the lectern, a few steps will take you into the south transept, but before entering, notice the hagioscope or 'squint' which probably dates from the thirteenth century and was provided to enable people in this part of the Church to witness the proceedings at the high altar. Close by is a small niche which is likely to have been the piscina of a pre-Reformation altar on this spot.

The lectern is a memorial to men of the village who fell in the war of 1939-1945.

The south transept was added at about the beginning of the thirteenth century and its arch and eight lancet windows are good specimens of Early English architecture. In the south wall is a large fluted piscina of the same period and this served the altar of St. John the Baptist which was here in medieval times. The recess close by was doubtless a tomb niche, perhaps of a member of the Sybill family of Little Mote in this parish, who used the transept as their burial place. Their successors at Little Mote, the Bosviles, were also buried here and in the floor is a memorial both to *'Mistress Mary Bosvile daughter of Sir Thomas Bosvile . . . who, like a jewel taken out of a box was shewn to the world and put up again, January 18, 1659, Aged 17'*, and to *'her mother Lady Sarah Bosvile, wife to Colonel Richard Grimes, who put off this her earthly tabernacle May 11, 1660'*.

Sir Thomas Bosvile died at Oxford in 1643 when about twenty-six years old, and was buried at St. Mary's Church there. His young widow was married to Colonel Richard Grimes for about fifteen years. The year 1660 was a tragic one for this family as, shortly after the death of his mother, Thomas, the brother of Mary Bosvile, died within the fortnight following his marriage to Elizabeth, only daughter of Sir Francis Wyatt of Boxley Abbey when he was only about twenty years of age. As his nearby memorial shows, he left a (posthumous) daughter, Margaretta. There is an interesting link here with the Romney family, prominent in the history of Maidstone, as Margaretta Bosvile grew up to become the wife of Sir Robert Marsham and mother of Robert Marsham, first Baron Romney. The interconnecting Marsham and Wyatt streets in Maidstone seem to symbolize this link.

The present barrel ceiling in the south transept replaced the former timbered one in the 1960 restoration and in 1963 the transept was paved with York stone by voluntary labour of the parishioners.

On your return to the nave, the next feature of interest is the chancel arch which is of late thirteenth century date. At this point the chancel was formerly divided from the nave by a rood screen, the ends of which were supported by the two fifteenth century stone brackets carved with foliage. Above the screen was the roof beam carrying the great crucifix between images of the Virgin and St. John; on each side of the chancel arch you may still detect the filled-in holes in the soffit, which held the ends of the beam.

Much of the timbering of the chancel roof is believed to be fourteenth or fifteenth century and is still in good condition.

Several of the walls of the Church date from the Norman period, but remains of the original windows survive only on the south side of the chancel, where you will see the semi-circular heads of two blocked lights near the top of the wall. The present two windows on this side are in the Decorated style of the fourteenth century; the western is a low side window which would originally have had a shutter below the transom, to be opened, it is thought, for the ringing of the Sanctus bell; the eastern contains two pieces of glass, probably fifteenth century, painted with single roses.

The quoins on each side of the apse are mainly of Caen stone and incorporate Norman carved fragments. The projecting stone on the south side is pierced with a hole and is a comparatively rare feature. Its medieval function was probably to suspend the Lenten veil before the high altar, in which case there would have been a similar stone at the opposite side of the sanctuary, as at Westwell, Kent. But it may have held a cord for the suspension over the high altar of a pyx containing the Host.

The striking apsidal sanctuary is of Norman origin, but was so reconstructed in the thirteenth century that Early English work now

predominates. The beautiful east window of three lancets is of this period and so is the comparatively rare and fine double piscina on the south side, with its stone basins, one fluted and the other plain, set in a trefoiled niche. This piscina was made at a time when two basins (instead of the usual one) draining into the churchyard were provided, so that there were separate ones for the water used in the cleansing of the chalice and for the ceremonial ablution of the priest's hands.

Retracing your steps from the sanctuary you will see on the north side of the chancel the blocked arches of an Early English arcade of two bays which formerly opened through the Norman wall into a chapel beyond. When the chapel was demolished *c.* 1500, the arches were closed and the present windows were inserted, thirteenth century material from the chapel being used for their rear arches.

After descending the chancel steps, if you look at the west wall of the nave, you will notice that the tower arch is not in the centre. The explanation is that originally the arch was central, but with the addition of the short north aisle early in the sixteenth century the lopsided effect was produced by building a new nave wall (incorporating the arcade) immediately inside the former Norman north wall. This was probably done to minimise interference with the use of the Church during the alterations; after the transfer of the roof structure to the new wall, the old one was isolated from the nave and could be demolished.

A two-manual electrically controlled pipe organ, installed in the eastern arch of the Tudor arcade in 1962, has replaced the trackeraction organ which occupied the south transept for the past hundred years.

The Tudor arcade is unusual in having rebated arches; this indicates that above capital level they were filled with boarding, probably covered with painted decoration. Traces of colour are still to be seen on the Kentish ragstone blocks of which the arches are built.

Above the arcade is a single clerestory window. This and the other windows of both the nave and the north aisle are in the late Perpendicular style of about 1500 or a little after and, with the exception of those in the south wall of the nave, have wooden lintels. Dry rot made it necessary in 1963 to replace the wooden lintels in the south-wall windows of the nave by concrete.

By passing alongside the organ (avoiding the floor irregularity) into the Tudor north aisle you would enter the former Chapel of St. Katherine, but it has become necessary to use this chapel as a vestry and the door is normally locked. The curious transversal roof of the aisle displays good timbering supported at the centre by two stone brackets carved in the form of human faces, one having foliage at the mouth. They may well represent the May Queen and Green Man of the traditional May Day festivities, which were of very early origin; these were carried on in Eynsford until comparatively recent times.

As you go round the Church, notice the numerous carved stone heads

projecting from the walls. You will find them on the north and west walls in the nave, on the porch exterior, and both within and outside the tower. They are not in their original positions and were evidently inserted for preservation at some time when restoration was in progress. All are medieval and at least one appears to date from the twelfth century.

Tour of the Church: Exterior

Leaving the Church by the west door, turning right and following the path alongside the Church you will see the two gables of the Tudor north aisle which are of unequal proportions. The chancel wall a little further on, shows one of the blocked Early English arches of the former chapel arcade.

By continuing along the path to the east of the Church you will be rewarded with an excellent view of the building with the bridge and river Darent in the background. The sanctuary roof, higher than the nave or chancel, was raised to its present pitch in the nineteenth century restoration.

Turning now to the south side of the Church, notice how the sill of the 'low side window' in the chancel is carried down in contrast with the windows on either side. As you pass the south transept you will see that in addition to the fine array of Early English lancets there was a circular light in the gable, which is now blocked. You now come to the south wall of the nave, partly composed of the original Norman masonry of unknapped flint rubble, and you will note that its west end is in ruins, the quoin having disappeared. This evidently occurred when the tower stairway turret was demolished and traces of its upper and lower doorways are clearly visible on the south side of the tower.

The tower itself dates from the thirteenth century, but the slender shingled spire is believed to be somewhat later. The iron gates at the porch entrance were installed in 1896.

In 1961 the lychgate and churchyard wall were moved eastward some eight feet to provide a pavement for pedestrians. The lychgate is a memorial to Elliott Downs Till, a prominent resident of Eynsford. As the memorial tablet in the lychgate states, he was a friend and benefactor of the village and through his initiative, Eynsford was the first village in England to celebrate Arbor Day, the first occasion being in commemoration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Till died in 1917 at the age of 82 and his grave in the churchyard may be seen near the rear of the Church. It was he who had the opening lines of Robert Browning's poem 'Rabbi Ben Ezra':

'Grow old along with me
The best is yet to be'

put on an oak frame surrounding the new dial of the clock in the Church tower, when the clock was removed for repair in 1903.

For more than 800 years, in dangerous eras as in more settled times, this lovely church has stood here at the centre of a delightful village, under the patronage of the great Saint Martin of Tours, Bishop, Monk, Missionary, Saint of strong and burning charity, witnessing to the faith, loyalty and love of those who have served it through the ages. This ancient parish church reminds us of the togetherness of God's people in this life and the life to come, of the invisible church which is by far the greater part of the church.

The present-day parishioners are thankful that, despite the enormous cost, it has been possible for them to carry out extensive repairs in order to keep the building intact. They pray that they and their successors, as trustees of this rich inheritance, will be enabled to continue to maintain it worthily, to the greater glory of God.

. . .

"O God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; mercifully grant that at the intercession of blessed Martin thy Bishop and Confessor, we may be defended against all adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord." Amen.

(The Old Collect for November 11th, Saint Martin's Day)

A factual account of Thomas a Becket's dealings with King Henry II

prepared by G. W. MEATES

THOMAS BECKET (1118-1170)

The ferocious deed that took place that winter night in the chilly darkness of the Cathedral Church of Canterbury resounded through Christendom. Rumour, full of tongues, condemned the blasphemous tyranny of a powerful king and uplifted the sanctity of an heroic churchman. Before two years were out, the great archbishop, spontaneously acclaimed a martyr, was placed by Pope Alexander III among the saints in Heaven. Chaucer, in after years, struck the note of veneration that the name of St. Thomas evoked among people of every sort. Of his pilgrims he wrote:—

'. . . to Canterbury they wende,
the holy, blisful martyr for to seke . . .'

The drama of Becket's life and death has stood through the centuries. Down the ages to our own day historians, poets and dramatists have expressed the different angles from which he may be regarded — his holiness, his blissfulness, his martyrdom.

The roots of the quarrel between Henry II and his archbishop lay deep, and among them rested the small lordship of Eynsford, destined, as we shall later see, to be one of the causes that led directly to the final catastrophe.

Henry II was one of the most powerful rulers in Europe. Son of the empress Matilda and Geoffrey Plantagenet, and great-grandson of the Conqueror, he combined in himself both the Norman ruthlessness and instinct for order and the Plantagenet tendency to fury and impatience of opposition. But he was no tyrant. Well-read, a lover of learned conversation, this sturdy man, with his cracked voice, ruddy face, his close-cropped sandy hair and piercing grey eyes, commanded the deep respect of his countrymen. But beneath lay a will of steel, a determination to reorganize his kingdom and to bring all his subjects under the emerging Common Law of England. And to those who opposed him he showed an unrelenting resolution. Where persuasion failed — and he was the greatest master of diplomacy of his age — his methods of compulsion were firm and usually humane.

As soon as he ascended the throne in 1154 he began with furious energy to restore his kingdom after the anarchy of Stephen's reign. His success was speedy. He brought his barons under control and established order in the affairs of his kingdom, especially in the sphere oflaw — for to Henry obedience to the law by all his subjects was paramount. He determined to rule by law, and to compel all to obey it.

But here the great Plantagenet fell foul of the one power which in

that age no prince could safely challenge — the Church. And by so doing, he suffered a defeat that impressed his contemporaries more than all his triumphs. In those days the Church interceded in a very real manner for the souls of both weak and strong, kings among them; without the intercession of Holy Church there was no salvation from the powers of evil and those eternal torments over which they presided. And behind all the superstition of the age lay the conception, shared by all, that the universe was governed by divine law. Secular law, except where sanctioned by the Church, was in quality evanescent. The Church existed for everyone. It opened its doors to all, it gave purpose and significance to every individual life, it united the dead, the living, and the unborn. It exercised immense power over the minds of all its children.

Ecclesiastical dignitaries were skilled administrators and rulers, often chosen for high office in the affairs of the kingdom. Bishops and mitred abbots sat with the barons in the royal Council, and their wide landed possessions, which they held of the king, as secular barons, brought them in his opinion within the secular law. This contention between Church and State had been growing since the time of the Conqueror, and Henry determined to resolve it. By now, ecclesiastical courts had extended their jurisdiction not only over churchmen, but over a wide range of matters affecting laymen; and men in holy orders were being accorded exemption from the ordinary process of the Common Law. Any cleric who committed even a criminal offence could demand trial by the Church, and the Church claimed this as of exclusive right. This cut right across the law-making of Henry — the new Common Law for all Englishmen was confronted by ecclesiastical privileges incompatible with his object. Henry's position was difficult, for an affront to Holy Church was an affront to Heaven.

To help him in this conflict, Henry selected Thomas Becket, a brilliant ecclesiastical lawyer and Archdeacon of Canterbury, as his royal Chancellor. The two men quickly became firm friends. Henry trusted Becket, and soon he became the most resplendent man in England, a man with a huge attendance, wearing the embroidered robes of a baron, a man at once haughty and arrogant — once when riding with the king, he told his sovereign that his royal cloak was unfit to give to a beggar, whereupon the king retaliated by tearing off Becket's own cloak and throwing it down to the poor man — a very different story from that of St. Martin, who under similar circumstances had willingly and of compassion given his cloak away. This throws a light upon the character of Becket in the days of his pride and arrogance when he was serving and supporting the king.

In 1162 the archbishopric of Canterbury fell vacant, and Henry, convinced of Becket's devotion to himself and his projects, and relying on his friendship and collaboration, appointed him to the sacred office.

But in elevating Becket, the king made a grave miscalculation. From the moment when the new archbishop was seated in the chair of St. Augustine, he completely changed his way of life. He donned the black robes of a Canterbury monk, and resigned his chancellorship despite the entreaties of his king, who had seen in the union of the Primacy and the royal Chancery the solution to all his problems. From having been the most loyal of royal lieutenants, Becket transferred his allegience to a more powerful Master, and, as it seemed to the king, most ungratefully sacrificed his interests. From that moment the die was cast; the road to disaster lay open. From the closest of friends, Henry and Becket suddenly found themselves implacable antagonists. Both were of the same imperious, overbearing will; each was full of determined and restless energy.

Henry now tried to remove Becket from the Primacy, and within a year he had out-manoeuvred the tall, gaunt archbishop. With the help of the Pope himself, who desired to retain Henry's friendship, and of the group of English bishops, led by Gilbert Foliot of London, who regarded Becket as an upstart, he compelled him to accept the proposition that clerics must henceforth come under the law of the land, sealing this with his Constitutions of Clarendon. Becket wavered, the bishops were undecided, and then the Pope refused his consent to the Constitutions. Henry was now determined to get rid of the man to whom he attributed the Pope's refusal; Becket was summoned to appear before the royal Council at Northampton on a technical breach of feudal law, and there he spurned the authority of the royal Court — "I will not hear your judgment! Under the protection of the Apostolic See I depart hence!" He fled to France and for six years remained in exile. Attempt after attempt was made, by the Pope and the French king, to effect a reconciliation. Becket was adamant in his refusal.

His policy of breaking his opponents, both bishops and lay lords, by his increasing use of the supreme sanction of excommunication, was surrounding him on the one hand with the aura of sanctity and on the other with the miasma of hatred. A case of particular interest to us was his treatment of William, Lord of Eynsford, which helped no little to build up the royal determination to cast him down. The lordship of Eynsford was held by the archbishop, and William was his man; but William's grandfather had made a bequest of the church of St. Martin to the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, the patronage remaining to the lay lord. A vacancy occurring, the archbishop, considering himself entitled to the patronage of all churches on estates under his own lordship-in-chief, presented a priest to Eynsford. William de Eynsford at once objected to this high-handed action and turned out the new incumbent. Thereupon, the archbishop excommunicated William, and the latter, one of the members of Henry II's court, personally appealed to the king. Henry's reaction was immediate. He protested that his royal

dignity had been injured and that the excommunication was void. In this he was on sure ground, for the customs of the kingdom, established by the Conqueror, forbade such sentence on the king's barons without the royal consent. Becket bowed to this and withdrew the excommunication; but the damage had been done, the breach between Henry and his archbishop was further widened. The logic of events, however, made it plain to Henry that he could not govern England without the support of the Church. In the presence of the French king, he and Becket met peaceably; the archbishop's forfeited estates were restored, and Henry showed himself ready to receive him back into his realm. But it was noticed that the kiss of peace was not exchanged; the quarrel had been patched up, but not appeased.

Becket knew the risk he was running if he returned to England, but his own safety was the last thing that concerned him. On December 1st, 1170, he landed at Sandwich, and all the way to Canterbury the road was lined with praying and rejoicing throngs. In the city he was welcomed with trumpets and psalms, and when he took his place upon his throne in the Cathedral his face was transfigured with happiness. "My lord," one of his monks whispered to him, "It matters not now when you depart from the world. Christ has conquered! Christ is now King!"

But the archbishop at once passed further sentences of excommunication upon those remaining hostile to him, as he had done in the case of William de Eynsford, and when the news reached the king in Normandy he flew into an ungovernable rage. "What idle and coward knaves have I nourished as vassals," he exclaimed, "that faithless to their oaths, they suffer their lord to be mocked! Will no one deliver me from this turbulent priest?" The fatal words had been spoken. Four knights — Reginald FitzUrse, William de Tracey, Richard le Breton, and Hugh de Morville — took the king at his word and set out for England. On December 29th, having stopped at Saltwood Castle, the home of one of Becket's bitterest enemies, Sir Ranulf de Broc, they arrived with some of de Broc's men, at Canterbury.

The archbishop was sitting after dinner in his chamber. The four knights trode in and sat down on the floor, watching him in grim silence. He demanded their wishes; they replied with curses that he must raise his excommuncations and leave the kingdom. He cut across them with a sharp order to stop brawling, whereupon they rose and approached him shouting. He shouted back at them "I am not moved by threats, nor are your swords more ready to strike than my soul is for martyrdom. Go, seek him who would fly from you. Me you will find foot to foot in the battle of the Lord". And as they withdrew shouting further threats, he followed them to the door and cried after them in defiance "Here, here, you will find me."

He was now expecting immediate death. He was, indeed, deliberately seeking it. In his Nativity Sermon on Christmas Day he had told the packed congregation that they already had one Canterbury martyr — St. Alphege, stoned to death by the Danes long before — and that they might soon have another. And on the last night at supper he remarked to those about him that he who must lose much blood must drink much wine.

It was now nearly dark, and the monks had moved into the Cathedral for Vespers. The four knights, having donned their armour, returned to the hall; but the door was barred. Becket was urged by his attendant priests to take refuge in the Cathedral, pushing him into the dark, silent Church. But when they turned to bar the door, he sternly refused them, "It is not meet to make a fortress of the House of Prayer". Almost immediately the knights broke in from the cloisters, led by Fitz Urse; and at the sight of them the monks fled into the shadows. Three only remained with Becket — William FitzStephen, his future biographer, Robert of Merton his confessor, and Grim who held his cross. He descended the steps from the choir, calling out in a loud voice "Lo! here am I, no traitor to the king but a priest. What do you seek from me? I am ready to suffer in His Name who redeemed me by His Blood." Whereupon the knights came shouting and clattering through the darkness to where he stood beside a pillar in the transept, and as they closed in upon him they again demanded that he raise his excommunications. Rising above them in his great height, he answered "There has been no satisifaction made, and I will not absolve them!" "Then you shall die this instant," cried one of the knights. "I am ready to die for my Lord. May the Church through my blood obtain peace and liberty?" He resisted their efforts to drag him away from the altar of the transept, and they, fearing a rescue, began to strike furiously at him with their swords. A blow cut off his scalp, while another severed his cross-bearer's arm. Two more blows brought him to the ground, and a fourth scattered his brains upon the pavement.

The murderers fled and are heard of no more. But by his death the archbishop had triumphed. As the news became known a thrill of horror ran through Christendom. The king collapsed in an agony of lamentation. And then he did the only thing he could do; he threw himself and his realm upon the Pope's mercy. His continental domains were placed under interdict, but the Pope refrained from excommunicating him. And in time the sharpness was healed. After a magnificent shrine had been erected to enclose the remains of Becket, Henry came to purge his crime before the eyes of his people. At Harbledown, a mile out of Canterbury, he dismounted and made his way bare-footed through the cobbled streets to the Cathedral. Here, surrounded by prelates and watched by a vast crowd, he knelt before the tomb and at his own entreaty received the symbolic strokes of scourging.

As the years went by the great Plantagenet was forgiven, and the memory of Becket passed into the care of the common people. If we say that a man who lays down his life for his principles is a martyr, then St. Thomas of Canterbury was indeed such a one. King and Prelate are long since dust. Yet perhaps in death their hands approach once more in forgiveness and friendship — but in between forever stands a Martyr's Crown.

G. W. M.

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The illustrations of the church were drawn by the Reverend Denis H. Sweetman (Rector).

The list of Rectors and Vicars was compiled by Mr. Bertie Curtis Welch.

Rectors

1165 Laurence
1182 Gentil
1225 Henry de Cundicot
1232 Peter de Montgomery
1232 Nicholas
1233 William de Plessets
1237 William de Cerneia
1315 Vivian de Blanca Forti
1350 William of Brodele
1351 Robert de Solbury
1353 Thomas de Walton
1379 John Dautry
1393 John Lynton
—
1575 Henry Withers
1604 Thomas Beresford
1614 John Bowles
(Bishop of Rochester 1629)
1629 John Gifford
(Chaplain to King Charles I)
1677 Francis Porter
1691 Paul Colomiez
1699 Peter de Tascher
1731 John Lynch
1760 George Secker
1763 John Fowel

Vicars

1286 Robert de Farenbergh
1347 John Camberleny the Elder
1390 John Walton
1397 William Hayward
1400 William Burton
1400 John Foster
1502 William Wayenwright
1506 John Stodard
1574 John Hollande
1579 Richard Linberowe
1579 Mark Burre
1630 Richard Hariott
1651 John Beadle
1662 . . . Palmer
1666 Nicholas Felton
1669 Edward Tilson
1726 Edward Tilson, Junior
1748 Henry Herring
1750 Benjamin Longley
1783 Thomas Verrier Allkin
1784 James Andrew
1791 Henry Montague Davis
1803 Robert Moore
1807 George Parry Marriott
1852 Richard Nevill Cornwall
1870 Robert Browne
1877 Robert Hayman Whiteway
1890 Abraham Steer Hutchinson
1904 Charles Hare Simpkinson
1906 Maurice Curteis Elphinstone
1917 Thomas J. Mummery
1930 Thomas H. Groves
1946 Douglas George Hill
1956 Allan Aubrey Tuffin
(Vicar of Eynsford with Lullingstone 1962)
1967 Ian Alexander Hardaker
1971 Denis Harold Sweetman
(Rector of Eynsford with Lullingstone and Farningham 1973)

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